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Did Perception of the Economy Affect Attitudes to Immigration at the 2010 British General Election?^{*}

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Objective. Immigration and the economy were the most salient issues in British politics at the 2010 general election, yet the relationship between them remains unclear. This article questions whether perception of the economic situation influenced hostility to immigration to Britain during the 2010 general election campaign. *Method.* This article employs a logistic regression model using the 2010 British Election Study to test the effect of economic perception and other previously identified factors on hostility to immigration. *Results.* The results show that perception of the economy did have an effect on hostility to immigration at the 2010 British general election. However, the effect is negligible. *Conclusion.* The findings highlight the influence of other factors in predicting hostility to immigration, particularly identity and culture, party identification, and policy-based factors. The prominence of analyzing the effect of economic concerns in determining attitudes to immigration appears misplaced.

Economic liberalization, increasing international mobility, and political instability have contributed to unprecedented levels of migration in Britain (Ford, 2011:1017–18). In response, there is now a wide range of survey data and subsequent academic analysis available on British attitudes toward immigration (see John and Margetts, 2009; Ford and Goodwin, 2010; Ford, 2011 as examples). Together, they show that opposition to immigration has been increasing since the mid-1990s, and is especially powerful among those with lower educational qualifications, the working classes, and those who feel that their culture is threatened by immigration (Ivarsflaten, 2005:42). The breadth and depth of opposition has also risen in the last decade (McLaren and Johnson, 2007:709), with 47 percent of respondents to the 2010 British Election Study (BES) regarding themselves as angry about immigration to Britain.

The 2010 British general election came at a time of widespread economic uncertainty. The financial crisis that preceded it saw market confidence evaporate, leading to the nationalization of the Northern Rock bank and the U.K. government taking controlling stakes in the Royal Bank of Scotland, Halifax Bank of Scotland, and Lloyds TSB. For the

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TABLE 1
Most Important Issue Facing Britain at the 2010 General Election

The economy	47%
Immigration	14%
Crime	5%
Unemployment	5%
Consumer debt	3%

N = 16,816.

SOURCE: British Election Study 2010.

first time since 1997, unemployment rose past 2 million (Kavanagh and Cowley, 2010), and the argument that the economy and immigration were linked was heavily advanced by all major political parties during the 2010 general election campaign (Carey and Geddes, 2010). The then Prime Minister Gordon Brown spoke of the need for “British jobs for British workers” in 2007 (Kavanagh and Cowley, 2010), while the Liberal Democrats proposed a regional economy-based immigration policy. The Conservatives tried to play down the issue of immigration (Green, 2010), but still committed themselves to reducing immigration “to tens of thousands rather than [per year] . . . hundreds of thousands” if in government (Prince, 2010). Immigration became such a concern for voters that 14 percent of respondents to the 2010 BES ranked it as the most important issue facing Britain.

However, the relationship between attitudes to the economy and hostility to immigration remains underresearched, particularly in the context of the 2010 British general election campaign, when—as now—the two issues were the most salient in British politics (see Table 1). This article builds on more general analyses and questions whether perceptions of the economic situation, on both retrospective/prospective and pocketbook/sociotropic levels, contributed to hostility to immigration in Britain during the 2010 general election campaign. First, it outlines the case for hypothesizing a relationship between attitudes to the economy and immigration. Second, it outlines the case against, discussing other factors that might contribute to hostility to immigration. Third, the article presents the results of a logistic regression model using 2010 BES data. The model finds that while perceptions of the economic situation did contribute to hostility to immigration, the effect is small. The article concludes by briefly discussing the possible implications of this for future research.

Dependent and Independent Variables: Immigration and the Economy

Fourteen percent of respondents to the BES 2010 identified immigration as the most important issue facing Britain. Migration to Britain is not a new phenomenon, with the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act forming the first legislative attempt to restrict immigration. Over time, immigration policy came to have an increasing focus on ancestry and heritage (McLaren and Johnson, 2007:711), but race was also important in attitudes to immigration. Nonwhite immigration engendered far more serious opposition than white immigration, spilling over into “race riots” in Notting Hill as early as 1958 (Ford, 2008). Moreover, since World War II, anti-immigration political campaigns by Enoch Powell, the National Front, and the British National Party (BNP) have largely focused on nonwhite immigrants (Ford, 2011:1020).

More recently, the Labour government post 1997 adopted a commitment to economic migration as part of a wider economic policy (Flynn, Ford, and Somerville, 2010). Under

this approach, “desirable” migrants, such as highly skilled workers and students, were encouraged; those who were not deemed to contribute positively, such as asylum seekers or “abusers of the system,” were discouraged. They achieved some success in decoupling race from the debate about immigration (Ford, 2008). However, ultimately, New Labour’s approach created the perception of an immigration system in crisis, and contributed to the salience of the issue in the 2010 general election (Mulvey, 2011:1490).

The severity and duration of the recession were unprecedented, and in the 2010 BES, 47 percent of respondents identified the economy as the most important issue facing Britain. The most severe economic downturn since the 1930s, the 2009 global recession had substantial impact upon the British economy. It followed a prolonged period of economic growth: between 1997 and 2007, U.K. gross domestic product (GDP) increased by an average of 3.2 percent per year. Yet in 2008, GDP fell by 1.1 percent, with a further 4.4 percent contraction in 2009 (Giudice, Kuenzel, and Springbett, 2012:1).

The combination of the economic downturn and changing patterns of immigration represents a significant change to lives of citizens in Britain and challenges citizens’ political attitudes. If immigration were perceived to have contributed to the economic downturn, it might be perceived as a threat. As Grayson (2013:389) notes, “threats provide citizens with ontological security . . . about their own identity, their rightful position in the world and who (or what) poses a danger to them.” Immigration does not therefore simply generate rational responses devoid of feeling (Convoer and Feldman, 1986:51). It also generates emotional responses that influence and shape political behavior (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKeun, 2000; Huddy et al., 2005; Brader, 2006; Valentino, Gregorowicz, and Groenendyk, 2009).

Gray (1990) argues that such emotional responses serve to trigger political action. Emotional responses can be positive or negative, depending on the context. Major surveys of political attitudes, including the BES utilized in this article, include questions on emotions in relation to political action. In relation to negative emotions, the focus is largely on the emotions of “fear” and “anger.” Fear as an emotion is based on anxiety; it promotes cautious action and often different responses from person to person. On the other hand, anger is a decisive action that generates strongly held negative convictions (Lockerbie, 1993; Valentino et al., 2008). Matheson and Anisman (2009) similarly argue that anger is a much more active emotion than fear. Wagner (2014) suggests that anger is a more appropriate emotion to analyze when considering political action in which blame can be attached to an external actor. This is clearly the case with respect to the rise in immigration. As McLaren (2012:171) argues, “politicians and institutions are likely to be blamed for failing to control immigration adequately.” For this reason, and because anger represents an articulated hostility (in contrast to “fear”), this article uses anger about immigration to Britain as the dependent variable in the model.

Perceptions of the economy in relation to hostility to immigration are important not just in the context of British politics, but also globally. International public opinion polling repeatedly suggests that while the public supports increasing international trade and financial integration, this does not transfer to support for immigration (Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo, 2013). Paradoxically, political elites in Western democracies appear to view immigration as a necessary good for their economies, while at the same time, electoral realities dictate otherwise (Sides and Citrin, 2007). Within this context, previous research has shown a link between attitudes on issues related to the economy and immigration, specifically between poor economic performance (and subsequent negative perception of the economy) and negative attitudes towards immigrants. Citrin et al. (1997:860) argue that the substantial amount of literature on economic perception and its effect on political activity amounts

to the “general prediction that at the individual level, economic threat, whether real or imagined, engenders opposition to immigration.”

Perceptions of the economy can be held at an individual level (the “pocketbook hypothesis”) or at a national level (the “sociotropic hypothesis”) (Kinder and Kiewiet, 1979, 1981; Dettrey, 2013). The pocketbook hypothesis argues that an individual’s perception of his or her own economic situation affects the individual’s attitude to immigration, which poses a real or perceived economic threat. This threat can take many forms. In times of high unemployment, immigrants may be viewed as unwelcome competition for jobs and wages (Espenshade and Calhoun, 1993). Indeed, Ivarsflaten (2005:22–23) notes that there has been a well-documented tendency in the social sciences to explain public opposition toward immigration in economic terms as a clash of interests. Burns and Gimpel (2000) contend that such perceived individual pressures are more likely to affect the low skilled and low paid. Increased fears over job security at the individual level since the 2008 economic downturn further supports the pocketbook hypothesis (Rydgren, 2008; Cutts, Ford, and Goodwin, 2011:428–29).

The sociotropic hypothesis argues that perceptions of the national economy, rather than individual circumstances, affect attitudes to immigration. Underlying this hypothesis is the argument that liberal immigration policies generate a tax burden based on higher welfare and public service spending (Passel and Fix, 1994; Citrin et al., 1997). Since 2010, the British government has explicitly linked the issues of immigration and welfare. Citing Labour’s period in government, David Cameron claimed that the fact that “five million people . . . [were] on out-of-work benefits . . . at the same time as the largest wave of migration [in British history showed a] vital connection between welfare reform . . . and immigration” (Cameron, 2013). In the context of significant cuts to public services and the prevailing rhetoric of austerity, the linkage of these two issues may well have had an impact on public attitudes to immigration. Indeed, Skinner and Latter (2014) note that the issue of immigration has increased to be of equal salience to voters in Britain as the economy since 2010.

More recent work has demonstrated stronger pocketbook influences upon political attitudes (see Nannestad and Paldam, 1997). Sanders (1999) found that, in the British 1997 general election, citizens were more likely to base their vote choice on pocketbook than sociotropic economic perceptions. In a cross-national study, Gomez and Wilson (2006) found that voters’ political sophistication influenced the relative importance of pocketbook or sociotropic concerns, with the politically sophisticated more likely to “vote pocketbook.” However, the evidence is not universal, and Filindra and Pearson-Merkowitz (2013) found that, in the American context, sociotropic economic concerns made people more likely to support restrictionist immigration policies.

As well as distinctions between pocketbook and sociotropic perceptions of the economy, temporal distinctions are also important. An individual’s retrospective views might differ from his or her prospective views. Killian, Schoen, and Aaron (2008) found that prospective perceptions of the economy, both pocketbook and sociotropic, are generally more positive than those that are retrospective. Lockerbie (1993) found that respondents with a retrospectively negative pocketbook perception of the economy were more likely to blame the government, and thus be politically and democratically dissatisfied. However, as Citrin et al. (1997:862) argue, the economic situation is just one driver influencing public attitudes toward immigration, yet it has often amounted to be the dominant factor that is considered in social science research (Ivarsflaten, 2005). The next section outlines other factors that might have influenced hostility to immigration at the 2010 general election.

Other Factors

Previous work has shown that economic perception is not the only factor influencing attitudes toward immigration (Citrin et al., 1997; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior, 2004; Ivarsflaten, 2005; McLaren and Johnson, 2007). This study will therefore control for a range of other factors that have been identified as affecting hostility to immigration.

The identity-based hypothesis proposes that economic perception is not the primary predictor of hostility to immigration, but that such hostility arises from discomfort and unease at threats to national identity and social culture. Grayson (2013:382–83) argues that the anxieties linked to perceptions of transformations in culture and identity make more restrictive immigration policies politically feasible. Ford and Goodwin (2010:15) argue that those who engage with the media that espouse anti-immigration views are more likely to be hostile to immigration, echoing earlier findings by Arzheimer (2009) and Ivarsflaten (2005) regarding the relationship between reading the anti-immigrant media and European extreme-right parties. McLaren and Johnson (2007:715) highlight previous research showing that “exclusionary reactions to immigrant minorities in Western Europe and the United States” are more strongly linked to “symbolic concern(s) about cultural threat and maintenance of cultural unity and distinctiveness” than to “individual or collective economic threat.” However, Blinder, Ford, and Ivarsflaten (2013) suggest that while hostility to immigration is deeply felt by many British citizens, this may not outweigh what they deem the “better angels of our nature”—the Western norm of opposing prejudice.

Such findings are not restricted to Britain. At the European level, Ivarsflaten (2005:35–36) found that those educated to at least degree level were more likely to support liberal immigration policies than those who were not, and that cultural unity and identity was the most important explanation in these policy preferences. Similarly, analysis by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia shows that levels of education, income, occupation, age, locality, religiousness, political positioning, and gender all impact, to varying degrees, on hostility toward immigrants (Coenders et al., 2004:22–24). Furthermore, the issue of immigration has been racialized, with some migrant groups preferred to others along a clear “ethnic hierarchy” (Ford, 2011:1020). Hampshire (2005) has argued that nonwhite immigrants have become associated with “welfare parasitism.” The extent of hostility toward minorities in Britain has also been shown to be linked to a range of other factors, including class, gender, age, and education (Ford, 2008:614–15). Ivarsflaten (2005:42–44) also identified that hostility to immigration in Britain tends to be more established in those who are white, male, older, and working class.

Hostility to immigration has also been associated with support for far-right political parties. Party identification has long been shown to be a predictor of attitudes to immigration (Söderlund and Kestilä-Kekkonen, 2009; Bale, Hampshire, and Partos, 2011; Cutts, Ford, and Goodwin, 2011; Goodwin, 2011).¹ Parties further to the left of the political spectrum have traditionally been more receptive to immigration to Britain, while those on the right have been more hostile (Goodwin, 2011). Ford and Goodwin (2010:8–10) argue that contemporary support for the anti-immigrant BNP prior to 2010 was concentrated among working-class men in the north of England aged 35 or older, who viewed immigration as a concern almost to the exclusion of all other factors. Furthermore, an analysis of the attitudinal profile of BNP supporters in the 2009 European Parliament elections

¹Using party identification has its detractors among the scholars of British electoral politics. However, running any other variable relating to party support (such as voting intention) did not change the results of the model.

showed that they are “very much more anti-immigrant, Eurosceptic, racially prejudiced, homophobic, and hostile towards mainstream parties than the average respondent” (Cutts, Ford, and Goodwin, 2011:427).

As well as identity-based and party identification factors, hostility to immigration has also been linked with attitudes to political policies. Whitaker and Lynch (2011) note the relationship between euroscepticism and attitudes to immigration, which might be due to the perceived threat posed by decreasing national sovereignty and the wish to restrict immigration as a consequence (Ivarsflaten, 2005). Soroka et al. (2015) suggest that pressures from immigrants on free national health-care provision might generate hostility to immigrants, an issue that has been highly politicized in recent years (Dustmann, Frattini, and Hall, 2010). Finally, the model controls for attitudes related to military intervention in foreign countries. This is a policy issue that has polarized opinion across Western democracies. Cutts, Ford, and Goodwin (2011) also found that attitudes to British military involvement in Afghanistan influenced support for the anti-immigrant BNP prior to 2010. Our model will control for each of these previously identified indicators of hostility to immigration.

Data and Methods

This study employs a logistic regression model to examine whether perception of the economic situation has an effect in predicting hostility to immigration to Britain at the 2010 general election. Given the prominence of the economy in British political debate following the financial crisis, the 2010 general election provides a unique opportunity to determine the relationship between attitudes to the economy and hostility to immigration. The model uses data gathered from the 2010 BES Campaign Internet Panel Study, which conducted a preelection survey ($n = 16,816$) between March 29 and April 7, 2010.² Respondents were asked about their attitudes to various aspects of politics, including immigration and the economy, political parties, and areas of policy. They were also asked to choose up to four emotions from a list of 10 that best described their feelings about immigration. Four were positive feelings (happy, hopeful, confident, and proud) and four were negative (angry, disgusted, uneasy, and afraid). Two further options (no feelings, don't know) would exclude any substantive choices made.

As noted earlier, this model focuses on anger as a means of articulating hostility to immigration. “Angry about immigration” is therefore the dependent variable. “Uneasy” and “afraid” articulate an emotional response related to fear, which, as already discussed, is less helpful than “anger” in understanding a clearly expressed opposition to immigration. “Disgust” does little but replicate “anger” as an emotion (Marcus, Neuman, and MacKeun, 2000; MacKuen et al., 2010). While some have argued that anger and disgust can mean potentially different things to respondents in some contexts (see Wagner, 2014), studies examining attitudes toward immigration have often focused on “anger” alone as a dependent variable (Banks and Valentino, 2012). To test this, the model was run twice, using “anger about immigration” and “disgust about immigration” as separate dependent variables, with no substantive difference in the results. “Anger about immigration” is a dummy variable, recoded to represent not angry about immigration (0) and angry about immigration (1). Table 2 shows the extent to which people considered themselves angry about immigration.

²The model records $N = 13,361$. This is due to missing values on the independent variables relating to economic perception. However, this is still a very large sample size, and enough to provide evidence for this study.

TABLE 2
Anger About Immigration

	Yes (%)	No (%)
Are you angry about immigration?	45.3	54.7

N = 16,816.

SOURCE: British Election Study 2010.

The main independent variable, perception of the economy, is split into four separate variables: “retrospective pocketbook,” “retrospective sociotropic,” “prospective pocketbook,” and “prospective sociotropic” perceptions. Each variable is measured using a five-point scale, with 1 representing “got/get a lot better” and 5 representing “got/get a lot worse.” Given the debate between “pocketbook” and “sociotropic” perceptions of the economy, as well as potential temporal differences in economic perception, these variables are kept separate, as each warrants analysis in its own right.

Alongside the main independent variables, the model controls for various predictors of hostility to immigration highlighted in the literature review. In relation to the literature on identity and culture and immigration (see Ivarsflaten, 2005; McLaren and Johnson, 2007; Grayson, 2013), the model controls for a respondent’s ethnicity, class, age, sex, religion, educational qualification, and the newspaper he or she reads. Ethnicity is coded as non-white British (0) and white British (1). Class is split into two variables, and coded as not upper middle class (0) and upper middle class (1), and not skilled working class (0) and skilled working class (1). Two categories of age (18–24 and 35–44) are controlled for: those aged 35–44 were highlighted by Ford and Goodwin (2010) as most likely to be hostile to immigration, and 18–24 represents the youngest respondents, expected to be least likely to be hostile to immigration. Sex is coded as female (0) and male (1). Religion is split into two variables to allow distinction between those who are Christian (1) and non-Christian (0), and those who belong to another religion (Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Hinduism, Buddhism, or other religion) (1) and those who do not (0). Educational qualification is coded as no degree (0) and degree or higher (1). Finally, the model controls for whether a respondent reads an anti-immigration newspaper, coded as does not read *Daily Express/Daily Mail* (0) and does read *Daily Express/Daily Mail* (1), as these two papers have consistently espoused an anti-immigrant stance.

Given the prominence of immigration as an issue at the 2010 general election, the three main political parties (Labour, Conservative, and Liberal Democrat) are controlled for in the model, alongside the two most prominent anti-immigrant parties in 2010 (U.K. Independence Party (UKIP) and BNP). Each party identification variable has been recoded in the same fashion as the dependent variable: do not identify (0) and identify (1).

The final section of variables in the model controls for the relationship between hostility to immigration and attitudes to certain aspects of public policy. The variables “Britain’s membership of the EU” and “Britain’s involvement in the war in Afghanistan” are coded on a 1–5 scale, from strongly approve (1) to strongly disapprove (5). The variable asking if respondents are angry at the current state of the National Health Service is coded as not angry (0) and angry (1). The model also controls for Labour’s handling of the financial crises, coded on a 1–5 scale, from very well (1) to very badly (5). Controlling for previously indicated predictors of hostility to immigration allows an investigation of the extent to which perception of the economy had an impact on respondents’ likelihood of being hostile to immigration at the 2010 general election.

TABLE 3

Logistic Regression Detailing Predictors of “Anger About Immigration” at the 2010 British General Election

	β	SE	Odds Ratio
Constant	-3.680	0.157	0.025
Economic perception			
Retrospective pocketbook	0.097***	0.025	1.102
Retrospective sociotropic	0.069**	0.024	1.072
Prospective pocketbook	0.064*	0.029	1.066
Prospective sociotropic	0.021	0.027	1.022
Identity/culture			
White British	0.341***	0.077	1.407
Upper middle class	-0.244***	0.053	0.783
Skilled working class	0.223**	0.081	1.250
18- to 24-year-olds	-0.198	0.122	0.820
35- to 44-year-olds	0.197***	0.053	1.217
Male	0.225***	0.042	1.252
Christian	0.125**	0.042	1.134
Non-Christian religions	-0.317**	0.095	0.728
Degree	-0.212***	0.045	0.809
Anti-immigrant newspaper	0.414***	0.050	1.512
Party identification			
Conservative	0.349***	0.057	1.512
Labour	0.043	0.060	1.044
Liberal Democrat	-0.167*	0.073	0.846
U.K. Independence Party	0.546***	0.120	1.727
British National Party	0.874***	0.180	2.397
Policy			
Membership of EU	0.503***	0.018	1.653
Afghanistan	-0.024	0.024	0.976
NHS	0.741***	0.054	2.097
Labour—financial crisis	0.120***	0.021	1.128

Cox and Snell $R^2 = 0.238$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.317$; $-2 \log \text{likelihood} = 14,862.184$. $N = 13,361$.

Bold figures denote significant effects: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Dependent variable: Anger at immigration to Britain.

SOURCE: 2010 British Election Study.

Results

Table 3 presents results from a logistic regression analysis modeling hostility to immigration in the 2010 BES data set. While the model shows that those with a more negative perception of the economic situation are indeed more likely to be hostile to immigration, the effect is small, and much smaller than other variables in the model.³

Three of the four economic perception predictors show statistically significant but small effects on hostility to immigration. For the retrospective pocketbook perception (odds ratio of 1.10), retrospective sociotropic perception (odds ratio of 1.07), and prospective pocketbook perception (odds ratio of 1.07) variables, the odds ratios are very close to 1,

³Results here are discussed in terms of odds ratios (*eb*). The odds ratio shows how changes in the independent variable influence the odds of the “event.” In this case, the “event” is “anger about immigration.” Odds ratios higher than 1 indicate a positive relationship (i.e., more likely to be hostile to immigration), and odds ratios lower than 1 indicate a negative relationship (i.e., less likely to be hostile to immigration). The closer the odds ratio is to 1, the smaller the effect of the independent variable is.

suggesting that each had very little impact upon hostility to immigration. The impact of a prospective sociotropic perception was not statistically significant. The other independent variable in the model related to economic perception (Labour's handling of the financial crisis) also had a very small positive impact on hostility to immigration, with an odds ratio of 1.13. For each of the economic perception predictor variables, the magnitude of their effect on hostility to immigration is small to the point that they are practically irrelevant. Together, the results of this model indicate that at the 2010 general election, perception of the economy did not have any meaningful impact on hostility to immigration.

In contrast to indicators relating to economic perception, many of the indicators related to the identity-based hypothesis were supported in the model. White British respondents (odds ratio of 1.41) were more likely to be hostile to immigration, as were those who identified themselves as skilled working class (odds ratio of 1.25). Men (odds ratio of 1.25) were also more likely to be hostile, as were Christians (odds ratio of 1.13) and those aged 35–44 (odds ratio of 1.22) and those who read an anti-immigrant newspaper (odds ratio of 1.51). On the other hand, those who identified as upper middle class (odds ratio of 0.78) were less likely to be hostile to immigration. Those of non-Christian religions (odds ratio of 0.73) were also less likely to be hostile, as were those with a degree qualification (odds ratio of 0.81). The only group without a significant impact upon hostility to immigration were those aged 18–24. All of the statistically significant variables relating to the identity-based hypothesis had a greater impact in predicting hostility to immigration than those related to economic perception.

Most of the party identification variables in the model also had a significant impact. Those who identified with the Conservatives (odds ratio of 1.51) were more likely to be hostile to immigration. There was no significant impact on immigration for those who identified with Labour; however, those who identified with the Liberal Democrats (odds ratio of 0.85) were less likely to be hostile to immigration. Those who identified with UKIP (odds ratio of 1.73) or the BNP (odds ratio of 2.40) were more likely to be hostile to immigration, with each odds ratio suggesting a large effect. Association between hostility to immigration among UKIP and BNP identifiers is unsurprising, and likewise a lack of hostility among Liberal Democrat identifiers is to be expected. Again, however, those significant variables relating to party identification all had larger impact in predicting hostility to immigration than those relating to economic perception.

The final group of variables in the model is related to policy attitudes, and again most had an impact on hostility to immigration. Those with a more negative view of membership of the European Union (odds ratio of 1.65) were more likely to be hostile, while there was no significant relationship between those who opposed Britain's involvement in Afghanistan and hostility to immigration. Finally, those who expressed anger at the state of the National Health Service (odds ratio of 2.10) were more likely to be hostile to immigration. Again, each of the statistically significant variables relating to policy had a greater impact on predicting hostility to immigration than those relating to economic perception. Together, the model shows that perception of the economy played only a small part in predicting hostility to immigration at the 2010 general election.

Conclusion

Hostility to immigration has many different predicting variables, often deeply rooted in social structures and norms. The results of this study lend support to previously identified indicators of hostility to immigration. Indicators related to identity and culture are found to have an effect on predicting hostility to immigration, echoing previous analyses (Ivarsflaten,

2005; McLaren and Johnson, 2007; Ford, 2008; Cutts, Ford, and Goodwin, 2011), with a respondent's ethnicity, class, age, sex, religion, educational qualification, and the newspaper he or she reads influencing their emotional attitude in terms of "anger" to immigration. Findings relating to party identification indicators also support previous research (Ford and Goodwin, 2010; Bale, Hampshire, and Partos, 2011, Cutts, Ford, and Goodwin, 2011; Goodwin, 2011; Whitaker and Lynch, 2011). Those who identified with parties with more conservative policies on immigration were more likely to be hostile to immigration, while those who identified with parties with more liberal policies were less likely to be hostile to immigration. Finally, research suggesting that policy attitudes are also likely to predict hostility to immigration (see Ford and Goodwin, 2010; Cutts, Ford, and Goodwin, 2011; Whitaker and Lynch, 2011) was also supported in this study.

However, this study has called into question the extent to which economic indicators influenced hostility to immigration at the 2010 general election. The effect of economic perception on hostility to immigration in this study is statistically significant, but very small, and outweighed by every other statistically significant indicator in the model. Much more important in driving hostility toward immigration were matters relating to identity, party identification, and policy. This article therefore supports the conclusions of Ivars-Flaten (2005:22–24), arguing that previous research has placed unjustifiable weight on the importance of economic concerns in determining political attitudes and that, instead, other factors should be considered in analyzing hostility to immigration, rather than perception of the economy.

As Blinder, Ford, and Ivars-Flaten (2013:16) rightly argue, the intricate tradeoffs between the popularity of policies and their impact on electoral reputation continue to undermine the complexity of the politics of immigration. However, as this article has shown, the effect of perception of the economy in contributing to hostility to immigration is small, and its prominence in this particular area of study of political attitudes appears misplaced.

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